

Teal Decoys

A rare find for New Jersey collectors

The “rarest of the rare” is a term liberally applied to many collectibles, especially in the decoy world. But when it comes to collectors of New Jersey birds, especially coastal examples, it’s a valid description for teal decoys, and there are a variety of reasons that such few makers bothered to craft them.

BY DICK GOVE

FIRST OF ALL, teal come down from Canada in late August and early September, basically before the season even opens, and are in New Jersey for only a short while before heading south. They were seldom spotted along the coast, more likely found on the creeks and ponds dotting the shore-

line. They are very sporty birds but require few decoys and will usually decoy into rigs of other species like black ducks or mallards, so there was little incentive to produce them.

Harry V. Shourds, the most prolific of New Jersey’s makers, never made an example. Neither did Rowley Horner of West

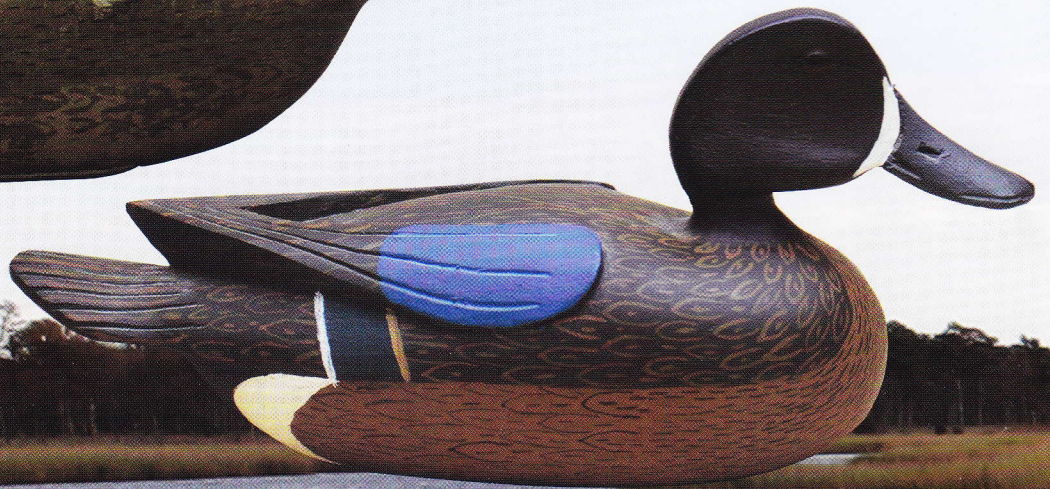
Creek, who some consider the most accomplished painter of coastal Jersey decoys. Examples of mallards by either of those makers are rare; neither green nor blue-winged teal are known to exist.

Those makers who did fashion green-winged teal decoys only needed a pair or two to pursue the species, so just a handful of examples are found in collections today. Charlie McCoy of Tuckerton is known to

Blue-winged teal by Jess Heisler of Burlington, made for use on the Delaware River.
COURTESY COPLEY FINE ART AUCTIONS



Blue and green-winged teal by Reg Marter of Burlington, New Jersey. Most examples of Marter’s teal are in near-mint condition, indicating they saw little if any use.





Pair of green-winged teal by John McAnney of Wading River. PAUL O'GARA COLLECTION

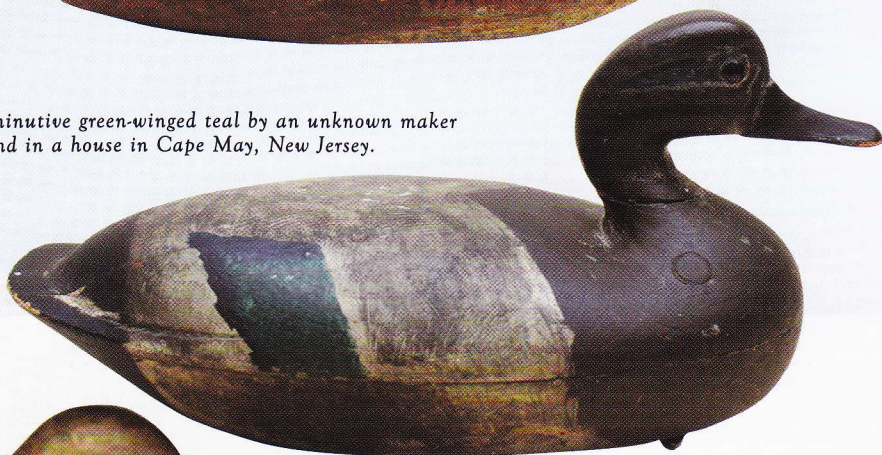
have made at least three pairs, one of which is pictured in "The Great Book of Wildfowl Decoys." One by Henry Kilpatrick was featured in "New Jersey Decoys" by Fleckenstein, but the few examples feature very basic paint patterns. There is at least one pair by John McAnney in a private collection and Guyette & Schmidt sold a pair by Henry Grant a few years ago. A diminutive green-winged teal by an unknown maker was found in a house in Cape May recently and Fred Shropshire of New Gretna made a few in a Delaware River style.

Rare blue-winged teal by Frank Lampson of Cedar Run, New Jersey. A noted builder of quality sneakboxes, Lampson was an early mentor to Hurley Conklin of Manahawkin.



But the rarest of all New Jersey coastal decoys is likely the blue-winged teal, and possibly the only early example is by Frank Lampson of Cedar Run, just south of Manahawkin. A noted builder of quality sneakboxes, Lampson was Hurley Conklin's mentor. When the blue-winged teal arrive early in the season they are in transitional plumage, and only an expert could tell the species or sexes apart, especially when shooting on the wing. Since the drakes don't get their full plumage until December, well after they've headed further south, green-winged teal hens were sufficient to lure the prey.

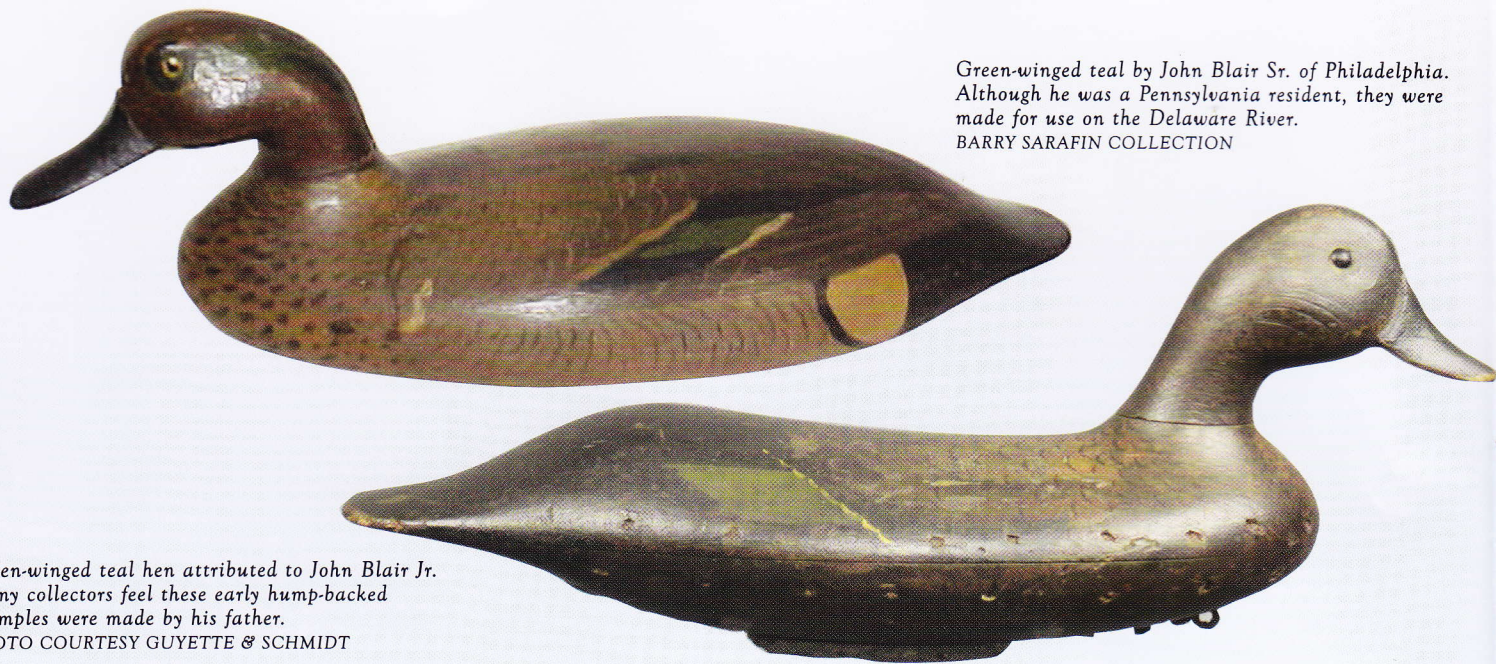
Diminutive green-winged teal by an unknown maker found in a house in Cape May, New Jersey.



There were only a handful of teal decoys made in the Delaware River region

One of three known pairs of green-winged teal by Charlie McCoy of Tuckerton. VANCE STRAUSBURG COLLECTION





Green-winged teal by John Blair Sr. of Philadelphia. Although he was a Pennsylvania resident, they were made for use on the Delaware River.
BARRY SARAFIN COLLECTION

Green-winged teal hen attributed to John Blair Jr. Many collectors feel these early hump-backed examples were made by his father.
PHOTO COURTESY GUYETTE & SCHMIDT

as well, even though they were shot in the adjoining rivers and streams. John Blair fashioned excellent examples of both green-winged and blue-winged teal, but whether they were truly required to lure in the birds is suspect. A couple of examples have been credited to the English family of Florence. Examples of green-winged teal by Jess Heisler of Burlington and Claude Trader of Florence have been identified. Reg Marter of Burlington made a fair number of teal - both blue-winged and green-winged - but most have been found in near-mint condition, suggesting they saw little or no use.

Later generations of New Jersey carvers focused a bit more of their efforts on teal. Jack Updike of Green Bank made three - two painted by Chris Sprague and the other by Lem Ward - but they were made primarily as decoratives in a hunting style. Bill Cranmer of Spray Beach made teal in the early 1950s and Jim West of Borden-

town made some working birds in the early 1960s. Hurley Conklin made quite a few, but nearly all were for a collector's shelf. During those years Tony Bianco, Bob White, John Holloway and Herb Miller all made small rigs for themselves or others. And many of today's modern era carvers, like George Strunk, Sean Sut-

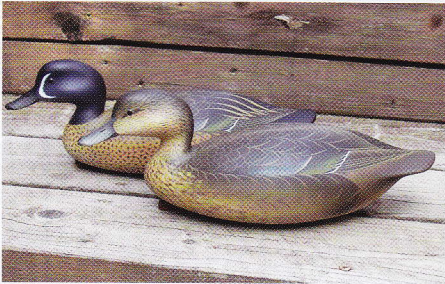


Sleeping green-winged teal hen by William Cranmer painted by Lem Ward of Crisfield, Maryland.



Pair of green-winged teal by William Cranmer of Spray Beach.

New Jersey salt marsh.
COURTESY JODE HILLMAN



Teal decoys from contemporary New Jersey carvers, (CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT) Jode Hillman, Rick Brown, George Strunk, and Sean Sutton. PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE CARVERS.

ton, Jodi Hillman and Rick Brown, among others, fashioned teal to showcase their carving and painting skills.

But when it comes to vintage examples from either the New Jersey coast or the Delaware River, teal decoys may be the

“rarest of the rare.” Any waterfowler can share a story on the difficulty of shooting a fast-flying teal on the wing, but bagging an example of one of their wood counterparts, at least from New Jersey, is even more of a challenge.



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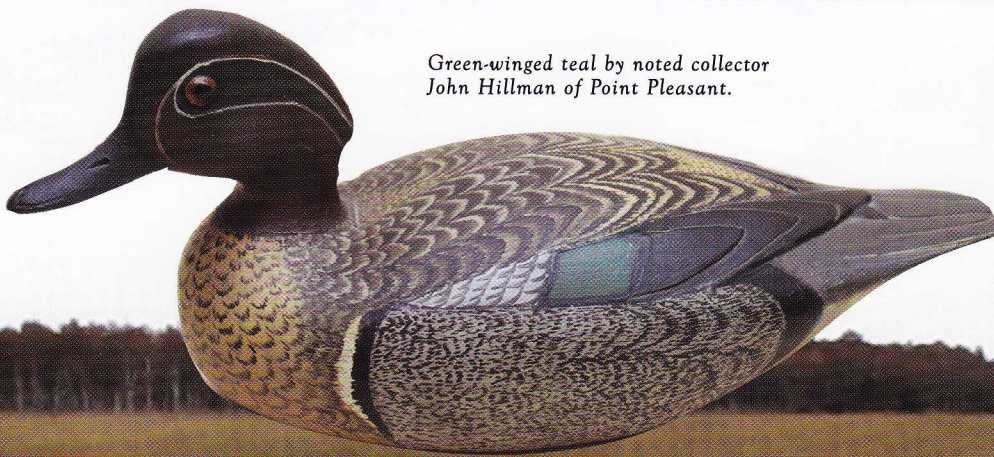
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Green-winged teal by noted collector John Hillman of Point Pleasant.



Green-winged teal by Tony Bianco of Bordentown.

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